

CIRCULAR LETTER

OF THE

Rt. Rev. James Rogers, D. D.,

BISHOP OF CHATHAM,

ADVISING HIS FLOCK

To Cease further opposition to the Non-Sectarian School Law,

(IN ORDER TO AVOID OTHER EVILS,)

AND

To work under it so as to gain its acknowledged
advantages, while still protesting against
its radical defect.

Given at Chatham, N. B., January, 1876.

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CHATHAM, N. B., JANUARY 3RD, 1876.

REV. AND DEAR SIR :

Ever since the so called non-Sectarian School Law was first proposed in the New Brunswick Legislature, up to the present, we have not ceased to remonstrate in every reasonable, legitimate and constitutional manner against that characteristic principle of the said Law, by which distinctive denominational religious teaching and influence are to be excluded from the education of children and youth in the common schools of the Province, which are supported by general and compulsory taxation.

In a country like ours, where the population is divided into so many Religious Dominations, each enjoying its civil right of existence, guaranteed to it by the principle of freedom of conscience of the Civil Constitution, to exclude "Sectarianism" is to exclude all Religious Dominations from the schools and make them simply non-religious or purely secular.

This is really a violation of that fundamental principle of our Political Constitution which recognizes and guarantees the rights of conscience to all citizens. To treat all the different Religious Dominations alike by equally excluding all is to administer equally to all, not justice and right, but injustice and wrong. It is like the case of an Estate in chancery which belongs to several rightful heirs who have undoubted claims ; but because of the trouble, by no means insurmountable, which it requires to adjust those claims, the Judge, wishing to treat them all alike, decides that no one of the heirs inherit any of the property, but that it be confiscated to the Government or State. So, because in some sparsely settled country districts, it would be difficult in practice for each one of the several Dominations of Christians to have its own particular tenets taught in the schools, therefore all denominational or sectarian teaching must be expressly forbidden in every school taught under the Law, throughout the Province !

If Christians, no matter of what Denomination, are sincere and earnest in professing to believe and obey HIM after whose name they are called Christians, they cannot ignore His precepts, such as :

"Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice and all things else shall be added unto you." (Matt. VI. 33.)

"What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark VIII. 36.)

"Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt. XIX. 14.)

Thus Christians are bound to seek for themselves and children, *in the first place*, the Kingdom of God and His justice ; that is the knowledge and practice of His law. They are bound to consider all the wealth, secular knowledge and advantages of the world *as nothing* in comparison with the saving of their souls and the souls of their children. They are bound to consider it criminal, forbidden by Jesus, to impede little children from coming to Him.

Now, all these precepts are ignored, nay virtually contradicted and violated by the system of education which forbids sectarian, that is religious teaching in the common schools.

In these schools all the children of school age, say from 7 to 14 years, of the Province, that is, all its future population, are expected to spend five days of each week during the seven years of their school life, receiving the impressions, imbibing the knowledge, and acquiring the habits, mental, moral and physical, which are to mould and fix their whole future individual characters. But of these impressions, of this knowledge, of the mental and physical habits which will go to make up the future man "Sectarianism," that is religion in any particular or definite form, must constitute no part !

Is not this a most flagrant violation of the rights of conscience of all Christians

in the Province who are taxed to support these non-sectarian schools? Is it not an employment, on the part of Government, of all its great influence for the purpose of preventing the future population from being educated in pious Christian sentiments? Is it not really enforcing in the schools a preference of "Mammon" to God? Of materialism to religion? Of worldly knowledge and interests to the saving of one's soul? The very reverse of what Christ proclaims!

I can well understand how this might be advocated by a number of Material Scientists, so called, who deny the existence of God, of the soul, of future life after this mortal life—who deny the truths of Divine Revelation, of man's creation, redemption and future destiny—who regard the human race as naturally "evolved" directly from the monkey tribe, rather than descended from God-created first parents, Adam and Eve. But how Christian Legislators and their Christian electors could sincerely wish to enforce this non-sectarian, that is necessarily non-religious or purely secular education for the school-going youth—that is the whole future population of the country—is such a paradox that one can hardly credit it to be possible!

And yet this paradox is not a mere fancy; it is an accomplished fact, a stern reality which the proceedings of last year in Gloucester, both at Caraquet and in the Court House at Bathurst but too palpably prove. Notwithstanding the respectful petitions sent to the Legislature and the persistent legal and constitutional remonstrances made by the whole Catholic population and many others comprising nearly half of the population of the Province, the non-Sectarian School Law was enacted by the Legislature and approved at the subsequent general election by the majority of the electors of the Province. The Executive Government have given proof of their determination to carry this Law into effect and to employ for that purpose all the resources of Government at their disposal—revenues, Military force, the Courts of Justice, &c., &c.

Therefore, in the present temper of the Government and of the majority of the population of our Province, we have no alternative but to cease the active opposition which however conscientious and justifiable, is found to be not only unavailing but has given occasion to men esteemed otherwise just and kindly disposed to outrage and oppress their fellow citizens, nay, even to wrong their own children as well as those of others, by depriving them of that really most priceless boon, a religious education! They are bent upon carrying out their own will, be it right or wrong, which they have made into law, and which they will follow up by employing all the powerful means placed at the disposal of Government to enforce law. In order then not to give even innocent occasion to greater evils, we must simply tolerate what we cannot prevent.

Thus, while still protesting against the objectionable feature of the School Law in question, we consent, through necessity, to work under it, hoping that the good judgment and a delicate sense of right on the part of our fellow citizens administering the law will do much practically to neutralize its radical defect and utilize whatever acknowledged advantages it may otherwise possess.

I beg to remain, Rev. and Dear Sir,

Faithfully Yours in J. C.,

+ JAMES ROGERS, BISHOP OF CHATHAM.